



# News Release

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## **Statewide updated mask order goes into effect Monday, Aug. 23**

**OLYMPIA** -- Today, Washington State Secretary of Health Umair A. Shah, M.D., MPH, amended [Order 20-03](#) requiring face masks for everyone over five years of age in most public indoor settings regardless of vaccination status. These include places like grocery stores, malls, gyms, and community centers. Masks are strongly recommended in crowded outdoor settings like sporting events, fairs, and concerts where physical distancing is not possible. The updated order goes into effect on Monday, Aug. 23.

The order reflects the recommendations of all 35 local health officers in the state of Washington and recent changes to CDC guidance that all people, regardless of vaccination status, wear masks in indoor public settings, in areas of substantial or high transmission. With the rise of the more infectious Delta variant, every county in Washington is currently categorized as having substantial or high transmission.

Reinstating mask requirements is necessary in addition to increasing vaccinations, to help reduce the spread of COVID-19 in Washington. The health care system is under immense strain, due in part to increased COVID-19 transmission, mostly among unvaccinated people. Between Feb. 1 and Aug. 3, 94.5% of COVID-19 cases who were hospitalized were not fully vaccinated.

“While vaccines are the pathway out of this pandemic, wearing a mask is necessary to stem the current increase in COVID-19 cases, driven by the Delta variant,” said Shah. “I appreciate the efforts of those who are already regularly wearing face coverings in public and urge others to join us in taking this critical step to control the virus. Each of us has a part to play to stop the spread of this disease in our communities.”

There are some exceptions to the indoor mask requirement, including:

Children under age five years of age. However, children age two to four years old can wear a mask under close adult supervision.

People with a medical or mental health condition or disability that prevents them from wearing a mask

Fully vaccinated workers who are working alone or in an area not accessible to the public

Athletes who play indoor sports and who are actively engaged in competition or practice (masks are still required on sidelines and in team meetings)

Small indoor private gatherings when everyone is vaccinated

Children under two years of age should not wear a face covering due to the risk of suffocation

It is important to use and handle masks properly. A mask should fit snugly around both your mouth and nose, and it should not have holes or tears in the fabric. Cloth face coverings should be washed frequently, ideally after each use, and certainly daily. If you are not able to wash it after each use, wash your hands or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer immediately after putting it back on and avoid touching your face.

You can find [more information about mask requirements](#) on our website.

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